UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-FIFTH SESSION

Official Records

FIRST COMMITTEE
40th meeting
held on
Monday, 19 November 1990
at 10 a.m.
New York

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 40th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. RANA (Nepal)

CONTENTS

- Question of Antarctica: General debate, consideration of and action on draft resolutions

This record is subject to correction.
Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, Room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.1/45/PV.40
23 November 1990
ENGLISH

90-63244 3210V (E)

best copy available

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 67

QUESTION OF ANTARCTICA: GENERAL DEBATE, CONSIDERATION OF AND ACTION ON DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

The CHAIRMAN: As members of this Committee are well aware, the Antarctic has been and should for ever be preserved as a demilitarized, denuclearized zone of peace and one that will never be subjected to any kind of military activities.

In this connection I should also observe that considerable concern about the Antarctic environment has been expressed in the international community, and widely covered in the media within the past year. Moreover, ongoing scientific research reflects that complex Antarctic ecosystems, and the unique atmospheric conditions there are vital to life on this planet. Even relatively small imbalances in them can have an adverse effect on climatic conditions world-wide and ultimately on the global food chain. This clearly underscores the interdependent character of this fragile region and the implications for international peace and security.

(The Chairman)

The record reflects that the Committee's deliberations have in the past made a very positive and helpful contribution to understanding these concerns and the unique character of the world's last continent.

It is against this background that our debate on the future of the Antarctic should be expanded and developed in the best interests of all mankind and in keeping with the latest positive developments.

Accordingly, I should like to draw the attention of delegations to the reports of the Secretary-General, documents A/45/458 and A/45/459, which are now before the Committee and which address some of the specific matters raised in the past year in resolutions 44/124 A and 44/124 B.

The Committee will have at its disposal three days - a total of six meetings - for the general debate, consideration of and action on this agenda item. As the Committee has decided, the deadline for submission of draft resolutions under agenda item 67 is today, Monday, 19 November, at 12 noon.

As it was also decided by the Committee, the list of speakers for the general debate on agenda item 67 will be closed today at 12 noon.

Mr. LEWIS (Antigua and Barbuda): Since this is the first time at this session that Antigua and Barbuda has addressed the First Committee, let me congratulate you most heartily, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship. I am most confident that you will continue to guide the deliberations in this Committee with the great skill and fortitude that you have exhibited so far.

There has indeed been much said and done since the question of Antarctica was debated at the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly. This has given hope and encouragement to nations and peoples outside the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party system. Indeed, my delegation was pleased to hear the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium state his country's position in his policy statement at the

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

general debate at the forty-fifth session. Whereas he did reiterate the fact that his country was in favour of the existing Antarctic Treaty, he emphasized that

"It is not enough to convert that continent into a nuclear-free peace zone. It is a particularly vulnerable territory, where ecological protection has to be stepped up."

With conviction, he declared that the protection of the environment is a daily struggle, and that Belgium had taken the lead in adopting legislation forbidding its nationals to participate in the exploitation of any natural resources on Antarctica.

Antarctica was the final major issue presented by the Foreign Minister in his statement, in which he ended by stating:

"We expect similar efforts in adopting protective measures for the continent. The Parties to the Treaty should also make available more and better information about their actions, especially in the United Nations."

It was a statement of major significance, as, for the first time since the question of Antarctica has been discussed at the United Nations, an Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party State has seen fit to state publicly to the community of nations that better information about actions taken by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties should be made available, "especially in the United Nations".

The testimony of Curtis Bohlen, Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, before the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations of the United States House of Representatives on 19 July 1990 revealed some concern about continued support among the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties for the Antarctica Minerals Convention. He stated that

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

"while most of the Antarctic Treaty Parties continue to support the Convention, some have begun to call for a permanent ban on mineral activities. The administration, he said, is mindful of the concerns that are being raised about the potential impact of mining on the Antarctic environment. He went on to state that the United States is consulting with other countries to find a solution that could re-establish consensus among all parties on this issue."

Mr. Bohlen's revelation that United States Antarctic policy is based on principles which the non-Treaty States hold in high regard adds further befuddlement as to why Antarctica is not brought under the aegis of the United Nations. The principles outlined by the Assistant Secretary were the protection of the environment of Antarctica and the continent's associated ecosystems; ensuring that human activities in Antarctica do not adversely impact the environment or reduce the opportunities to study and learn about national processes of global significance; and maintaining Antarctica as a land of science and a zone of peace, reserved exclusively for peaceful purposes.

From Down Under have come positive pronouncements which, we hope, will be considered seriously in a truly international environment. The New Zealand Parliament has passed a bill which bans all mining in the Ross Dependency and mining by any New Zealander anywhere in Antarctica. New Zealand has reiterated its policy for a World Park and has emphasized that it would like to have instituted an outright ban on mining.

These pronouncements and developments are welcome signs of developed countries trying to meet the demands of our universal interests. The reality of the situation is that environmental protection needs to be strengthened in Antarctica; that the near pristine nature of the Antarctic is an essential component of its importance as a scientific laboratory and has special value to the world; that the

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties need to broaden their understanding, workings and objectives beyond the small circle of those who are at present most directly involved in Antarctic policy; that there should be centralization in regard to Antarctic information, and that the United Nations is the most appropriate body to pursue the aforementioned. As such, we have annually requested that the Secretary-General of the United Nations be allowed to play a dominant role in Antarctica discussions and that South Africa be removed from any and all activities in Antarctica. We do not consider it responsible, nor comprehensible, that a system be maintained to protect South Africa, the outcast from nations which adhere to concepts of justice, democracy and humanitarianism.

READEX FICHE

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

The significance of direct United Nations involvement looms large, as it is quite clear that there is need for review of the present scientific programmes under way in Antarctica. There is much unnecessary duplication, and the generation of much waste which could be avoided. Subsequently, it would be more feasible to have research undertaken on an international basis. Such an undertaking would help to minimize the adverse impact of scientific activities on the continent.

Efforts on the part of the non-Treaty States to have drawn up a comprehensive environment convention on the conservation and protection of Antarctia and its dependent and associated ecosystems is certainly not in conflict with the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment drawn up at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Kuala Lumpur last year. The Declaration pointed out that any delay in taking action to halt the progressive deterioration of the Earth's ecosystem will result in permament and irreversible damage, and that the main environment problems facing the world are the "greenhouse effect", the depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, marine pollution, land degradation and the extinction of numerous plant species. There was the recognition that many environmental problems transcend national boundaries and interests, necessitating a co-ordinated effort; and further recognition that the success of global and national environment programmes requires mutually reinforcing strategies and the participation and commitment of all levels of society - government, individuals and organizations, industry and the scientific community.

The time is ripe for universal, concentrated effort in coming to grips with the issues pertaining to Antarctica, particularly those pertaining to environmental degradation and its impact on the global environment. Indeed, the whole world is buzzing with information on the environment. The renowned French naturalist, Jacques Cousteau, has stated that:

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

"the survival of the human race depends on the survival of Antarctica. An oil spill in Antarctic waters can damage the food chain for decades, and this affects us in the northern hemisphere."

The danger is real when we recall that in September 1988 a fuel bladder leaked at McMurdo releasing more than 13,000 gallons of fuel near Williams Field. On 28 January 1989, the Argentine vessel Bahia Paraiso sank near Palmer station, and a spill of diesel fuel was registered as a consequence of damage to the ship's tank. On 28 February 1989, the Peruvian ship Bic Humboldt ran aground in Fildes Bay, King George Island. Also in February 1989, the British supply ship HMS Endurance hit an iceberg near Deception Island.

There is therefore grave concern in regard to the environment - a concern manifested by the Prime Minister of Great Britain in her address to the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly on 8 November 1989. The Prime Minister stated that a British scientist on board a ship in the Antarctic Ocean declared that we are now seeing what may be really signs of man-induced climatic change. That was last year, and the scientist's perception of the ozone depletion gave grave cause for concern. We of course know that ozone in the stratosphere can block much of the ultraviolet radiation from reaching Earth. We also know that excess exposure to such radiation can cause skin cancer, and there have been studies which indicated that an increase in radiation can harm plants and the immune systems of mortals.

The hole in the ozone layer was discovered over Antarctica and it subsequently caused the international community to pay more attention to existing practices and to limit the production of ozone-destroying gases such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). With the discovery of the ozone hole in 1985 came the realization that Antarctica is a monitor of the health of the global environment. Through its remoteness, it contains the data on past climatic conditions recorded in its

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

ice-cover, and is therefore an irreplaceable standard for the measuring of levels of pollutants and global climatic change. Additionally, the Antarctic acts as a giant laboratory for much science that cannot be conducted elsewhere.

The British scientist also reported a significant thinning of the sea ice. He stated that:

"sea ice separates the ocean from the atmosphere over an area of more than 30 million square kilometres. It reflects most of the solar radiation falling on it, helping to cool the Earth's surface. If this area were reduced, the warming of the Earth would be accelerated due to the extra absorption of radiation by the ocean".

The sea ice also has other functions, as revealed by the National Science Foundation's polar study expedition of 1988. Cornelius Sullivan, co-leader of that expedition, declared that a vast population of tiny plants and animals live in ice that forms annually round Antarctica. The scientists found large and thriving populations of krill grazing on one-celled plants and animals that live in the ice pores. Obviously, the sea is a place where, with a minimum expenditure of energy, the krill can avoid predators and live in a rich pastureland.

Indeed, the Antarctic ocean is rich in planktonic species, which provide a foundation for the marine ecosystem. The convergence zone, where cold waters of the Antarctic sink below the warmer waters of the Pacific, provide the environment for explosions of life and nutrients, which find themselves carried thousands of miles to other parts of the Earth.

The continent of Antarctica is the world's largest wildlife sanctuary. It is home to over 100 million birds, including seven species of penguins. It has six species of seals, and is the summer feeding grounds for 15 species of whales. The waters of the southern ocean are among the most biologically productive in the

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

world, and support one of the Earth's unique, highly adapted and specialized ecosystems.

But even though some Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties have called for a ban on mining, there is still the threat of minerals exploitation, as some nations still see the Antarctic as the world's last great gold mine. As such, we heartily welcome the initiatives undertaken by Australia, France and New Zealand to ban mining and prospecting in and around Antarctica. We welcome also the decisions taken by countries such as Belgium, Italy and Spain not to sign or ratify the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA).

The Treaty Parties argue that CRAMRA was created to prevent an unregulated scramble for the resources of Antarctica - a scramble that would threaten the environmental and political security of the continent. But an Antarctica under the aegis of the United Nations would certainly minimize the occurrence of any such scramble. Furthermore, since we do not accept any form of national sovereignty over any part of Antarctica, no country or group of countries is in a position to issue mining rights. The reality is, however - as has been expressed by France and Australia - that mining activity in Antarctica would inevitably damage the environment.

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

I must therefore, on behalf of the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda, restate that the extraction of minerals poses a severe threat to the environment, and we do not consider the despoiling of a continent to be either ecologically or aesthetically responsible. Antarctica, be it remembered, is mankind's last frontier. Man's intrusion, if not carefully monitored and regulated, can dramatically alter global ocean and weather patterns.

Despite the massive size of the continent, only 2 per cent of Antarctica is seasonally ice-free. Most of this area can be found in small and isolated pockets around the edge of the continent, where there is competition between humans and animals for space. Much of the intrusion of man into this 2-per-cent ice-free area is thoughtless and unco-ordinated. In the process, valuable breeding grounds for much of Antarctica's wildlife is altered, leading to the destruction of the self-same fauna and flora that attracted some scientists and tourists to the region. One careless step could crush years of painfully slow growth on the minuscule lichen and mosses clinging to the rocks among the snow.

Human activity is having a disastrous effect upon wildlife. Wildlife has to compete with bases, to the severe disadvantage of the former. In 1983, when the question of Antarctica was first brought before the United Nations, there were 34 stations in existence. In 1989 there were 57 bases, operated by 20 nations - an increase of 23 bases in only six years.

This is frightening, for, under the Antarctic Treaty, countries seeking decision-making status would have to establish scientific stations or dispatch scientific expeditions. In this regard, the establishment of an international scientific station, or stations, by means of the United Nations would limit the duplication of some forms of research and would more readily lead to the drawing up of scientific priorities. Subsequently the number of stations would be reduced.

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

Another point for consideration is the existing waste from human habitation. With the intensification of human activity at particular locations, pollutants, such as highly carcinogenic compounds used in specialized electrical insulation - polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) - have been detected at higher concentrations in Antarctica than would be legal elsewhere. In other words, in this near-pristine environment, pollution from PCBs in specific locations receive greater accommodation than they would in large, industrialized centres.

So far we have not touched upon the ordinary waste resulting from human habitation, whether temporary or for longer duration. In that connection, it is clear that there is need for a comprehensive management strategy in regard to tourism. It is estimated that the number of visitors is now over 3,000 a year. There have been noticeable negative impacts, including the disruption of scientific programmes, and vandalism of historic sites. What is needed is a comprehensive management system, which should incorporate enforcement procedures, create a system for monitoring impacts, and set up liability provisions. Most waste generated there should be returned to the countries of origin for proper disposal, and waste-management plants should be continuously monitored against the release of toxic substances.

More and more, the renewed interest in the concept of a world park gives some hope for the future of Antarctica. A world park would undoubtedly provide for necessary environmental protection and ensure that wilderness values were paramount. Scientific research would be co-ordinated, and the Antarctic would be maintained as an area of peace, free of nuclear and other weapons and all military activities. This, most certainly, would be best handled through agencies of the United Nations.

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

The Antarctic Treaty parties and the non-Treaty States have been drawing closer to each other in terms of the recognition of specific needs. The non-Treaty States have worked hard for consensus on the question of Antarctica; hence the mildness of this statement. This is the forum for fundamental discussions on the matter. But here we have the majority of States Members of the United Nations endeavouring to come to grips with an issue that concerns all peoples, while at the same time the Treaty States are meeting in Santiago, Chile, without a representative of the United Nations Secretary-General.

We believe that the time has come for greater participation at the United Nations on matters pertaining to Antarctica from the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties. This year the prestige of the United Nations has risen. The President of the United States, in his policy statement, declared:

> "Not since 1945 have we seen the real possibility of using the United Nations as it was designed". (A/45/PV.14, p. 62)

The cold war has been buried. The Yemens have united; so too have the Germanys; and there is a general mood to togetherness in fighting oppression, destitution and many other global concerns. The time has come for the recognition that many of the sought-after goals can be achieved through the United Nations - minus, of course, the involvement of South Africa, unless it is to conform to the resolutions and declarations of this body.

A comprehensive environmental convention on the conservation and protection of Antarctica and its dependent and associated ecosystems can certainly be drawn up within the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Antarctica must be preserved as the common heritage of all mankind. We believe in the stated principles of the United Nations, and hence we shall continue to press for direct involvement by the Secretary-General, or his representative, in developments in and surrounding the Antarctic continent. The survival of the human

(Mr. Lewis, Antigua and Barbuda)

race, we are told, depends on the survival of Antarctica. We shall therefore continue to insist that it be brought under the umbrella of the United Nations. We are optimistic that many of the richer and more powerful entities of this world will realize that, in relation to Antarctica, selective multilateralism goes against the principles to which we are all pledged.

In conclusion, I must quote an almost-poetic passage from the Greenpeace publication A Realistic Dream for Antarctica:

> "Antarctica is awesome in its beauty. It is so magnificent, it is hard to put into words. Endless blue on white, the overwhelming numbers of breeding birds along the coast, the howl of the blizzard, the silence of the desert. It is our last continental wilderness - the coldest, driest, windiest, highest place on Earth. Its extreme climate and isolation has created a wonderland of global significance, a remarkable bastion of purity and silent beauty."

Let us endeavour to retain this purity and beauty.

Mr. RAZALI (Malaysia): May I extend the deep pleasure of my delegation at seeing you, Sir, in the Chair.

I wish to thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations for preparing the report on Antarctica, given in document A/45/459. As we enter the eighth year of the United Nations debate on the question of Antarctica, world attention on the state of the global environment has gained prominence in the agenda for the 1990s. This is clearly reflected in the various international conferences on the environment that have taken place this year alone. At the same time a number of conventions have been negotiated over the last few years, among others, the 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the 1987 Basel Convention on Dumping of Hazardous and Toxic Wastes. Work is also being undertaken to prepare a convention on climate change and biodiversity. The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Brazil will be one of the most significant conferences for the 1990s. The preparatory process of the Conference has begun and my delegation is pleased that at its meeting held in Nairobi in August, there was increasing recognition by the international community of the significant impact that Antarctica exerts on the global environment and ecosystems.

Antarctica is our last continental wilderness. We all have to work together to preserve this. Its extreme climate and isolation have created a wonderland of global significance, a remarkable bastion of purity and a rich haven for wildlife. Seventy per cent of the world's fresh-water reserves is locked in its massive ice-cap, while in the surrounding oceans the last of the blue whales roam. Indeed Antarctica is the largest wilderness area on this planet, and in many ways the most fragile. It is this fragility that is one of the primary concerns should the continent ever become the focus of major human activities. Antarctica is not

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

just an icy, frozen waste but a continent on, around and above which live remarkable wildlife. Bird life, colonies of penguins, swarms of krill and diverse species of fish all live in fragile coexistence. While scientific research continues, much remains unknown about the flora and fauna of Antarctica.

The terrestrial and fresh-water ecosystems of Antarctica are extremely vulnerable because in these incredibly hard climatic circumstances growth is very slow and recovery from disturbances can take years. To cite an example, a footprint in the moss-bed left by a careless visitor may remain unchanged for a decade. The extremes of the Antarctic climate have forced incredible adaptability upon its inhabitants. But this adaptation is dependent on a very small range of climatic activity. Any change in water temperature or quality could wreak havoc on marine life.

Normally, an ecosystem has a wide range of levels and interrelationships. It is this variety and depth that give the ecosystem stability. However, Antarctic ecosystems contain very few levels despite considerable interrelationships. Consequently impacts on these ecosystems have more profound effects. One single species of krill may comprise about half of the plankton biomass. This biomass feeds seals, whales, fish and birds. Reduction through human exploitation of any of these components of the marine ecosystem can cause an imbalance. Such imbalance in the Antarctic is not easily restored by man or by nature.

The most striking feature of Antarctica is its ice sheet, formed by the accumulation of snow over the past 100,000 years. It covers approximately 98 per cent of the continent with an average depth of 1,600 metres and contains 90 per cent of the world's ice. More than 50 per cent of the continent is above 2,000 metres and about 25 per cent is 3,000 metres above sea-level. In addition, Antarctica plays a vital role in the Earth's atmosphere and oceanic system and major

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

changes in this environment could have an unpredictable impact on the world's climate. It is a unique natural laboratory for scientific research. Its relatively pristine environment, free from most sources of pollution, provides a baseline for detecting the chronology and effects of both natural phenomena and human activities in other parts of the world. The Antarctic ice-core yields atmospheric records covering millions of years, offering clues to past and future climate changes. Monitoring pollution in this relatively untouched global environment is an early warning system of increasing global hazards. For example, detection of DDT in penguin fat and eggs indicates the distances the chemical has been transported through the marine food web. Studying the movement of the cold Antarctic waters is fundamental to understanding ocean circulation and heat balances between oceans and atmosphere which is a crucial ingredient in the prediction of global warming.

Pollution is by no means widespread in Antarctica. With the increase in human activities the situation will however get worse. Both the number of countries establishing research programmes and the number of tourists seeking to visit Antarctica are increasing. These developments increase the need for energy, which raises the risk of oil spills and exacerbates the problem of waste disposal. They also subject an ever greater part of the continent to human impact, undermining its value as a scientific reserve and diminishing its natural beauty.

The vulnerability of Antarctica to an oil-spill is most alarming. In January 1989 the ship Bahia Paraiso carrying fuel to Argentina's research stations in Antarctica, was grounded on an underwater reef near the Antarctic Peninsula and spilled an estimated 693 cubic metres of diesel fuel. The spill may have compromised some long-term studies of Antarctic species; it may also have made it impossible to interpret research on the effects of increased ultraviolet radiation produced by the ozone hole over Antarctica.

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

Although a scientific assessment of the impacts of the Bahia Paraiso oil-spill is incomplete, two conclusions are apparent. First, the spill has adversely affected marine species and fouled the environment in the area. It killed all skua chicks and caused significant mortality among cormorant chicks, intertidal limpets and seaweeds in some areas. Secondly, and perhaps more significant, effects of the oil on marine life may distort results from research and monitoring programmes, some that have been going on for 20 years. In addition, natural recovery of spilled oil takes place more slowly in low polar temperatures than in temperate climates.

There are a number of real and potential threats to the Antarctic environment. They all come from the increasing presence of human beings and their related activities in and around Antarctica. Only about 2 per cent of the continent is ice-free and not all of the areas are easily accessible by sea. Prior to the arrival of humans a number of wildlife species used these regions for breeding grounds. However, humans also need this prime land to build their stations, and competition over space has resulted in continued increases in the numbers of humans present which could ultimately lead to the displacement or disappearance of much of Antarctica's wildlife, particularly if no breeding areas are left intact that are clear from litter, pollution, harassment or physical impediments.

The high price of entry into the Antarctic Treaty club through the need for maintaining scientific stations and programmes has caused overcrowded conditions in some of the more accessible ice-free areas. In the past decade, the number of Antarctic research programmes has nearly doubled, and the number of investigators who remain during winter months has risen about 800 to more than 1,000 annually. The impact of this increase is concentrated along the coasts where most research

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

stations are located. Indeed, these same ice-free areas are the natural habitat of native species. But as the community grows, exhaust from vehicles, disposal of solid and toxic wastes and other common forms of pollution from human settlements and activities increase. Current waste-disposal practices have already had an impact on flora and fauna. This is especially true during summer when human activities are at their highest levels. At many bases the current practice is to leave rubbish out in the open, where it is soon covered by blowing snow, or in some cases, blown in all directions around the base.

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

Furthermore, the extreme cold, combined with the lack of bacteria, slows down the natural process of decay, so that human rubbish does not disappear, even if out of sight.

Some bases have also turned to incineration to solve their solid waste problems. However, incineration merely shifts the impact from the Earth to the atmosphere, where winds can spread pollution over vast distances.

Sewage is also a problem for bases. The most common means of disposal is burial in pits or flushing directly into the sea.

It is our conviction that the current, predominantly national, scientific programmes undertaken in Antarctica should be reviewed, with a view to encouraging internationally co-ordinated scientific stations in order to minimize unnecessary duplication of activities and logistical support facilities. We believe that these measures would contribute to minimizing and avoiding the adverse impact of scientific activities in Antarctica. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the initiative taken by some Consultative Party countries to set up a multinational research station in Antarctica.

In addition, we wish to propose the establishment of a United Nations-sponsored station in Antarctica, with a view to promoting co-ordinated international co-operation on scientific research for the benefit of mankind, particularly research on the importance of Antarctica to the global environment and ecosystem. The United Nations station could also act as an early-warning system on climate change and accidents, such as oil spills. In the Antarctic a tanker accident would not have the benefits of easy access by air or people on land to assist in clean-up efforts. Further difficulties could arise from bad weather conditions, pack ice, the presence of icebergs and the onset of winter darkness.

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

Malaysia is concerned over the trend towards an increase of tourism in Antarctica, which could also have a negative impact on the environment. In 1987 2,400 tourists visited Antarctica. Large tour ships carried upwards of 100 persons each, and small sailing, mountaineering and skiing expeditions brought others. Passengers on the tour ships usually land on relatively circumscribed areas or at research stations, often disturbing local breeding sites, trampling on vegetation or interfering with scientific research. Ships carrying tourists plying around certain areas of Antarctica could have an impact on the environment.

A resurgence of commercial tourist flights over Antarctica began in 1987 to 1988, following a moratorium in the wake of the tragic Air New Zealand DC-10 crash on Mount Erebus in November 1979. The real threat of air traffic growth, however, is posed by flights to blue-ice airfields. Blue ice is highly compacted and is strong enough to permit wheeled aircraft to land at any time of the year. Large-scale hotels in Antarctica are also being proposed to take advantage of blue-ice tourism possibilities.

With a significant increase in the number of tourists, the fragile sites that are attractive to them will begin to show signs of irreparable damage. Tourist visits occur under much less controlled conditions. The impact on the environment of regular landings of ships and planes and the construction of permanent facilities for tourism may be significant. In addition, the level of activities associated with colonization has also expanded dramatically. Linked to the issue of territorial claims, some bases have introduced families, banks, supermarkets and hotels.

Antarctica also suffers from over-fishing. Since 1969 three of the most important commercial finfish species in Antarctica have been heavily overfished. There are grave fears for the future of the fourth species, due to a massive catch in 1982 to 1983. There is general agreement among most scientists that the

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

population of the most abundant species around South Georgia has been reduced to less than 2.5 per cent of the pre-exploitation level.

In recent years fishing States have turned their attention to krill. Unless the necessary steps are taken to control this fishery as well, the entire Antarctica ecosystem could well be threatened.

The most serious threat facing Antarctica is that of minerals exploitation. The risks of allowing mining in Antarctica are enormous, both to the environment and wildlife itself and to the unique opportunities for scientific research and discovery. Malaysia is concerned that should the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities be ratified and enter into force the pristine continent and last frontier of mankind would be exposed to the dangers of environmental degradation, with consequences for the global environment. If minerals exploitation proceeds in the Antarctic, not only will the environment suffer, but so will vital scientific research.

First, the spirit of co-operation will be lost as research priorities shift towards resource-exploitation and results increasingly are considered proprietary data. Secondly, the Antarctic ice sheet has become a history book on climate and other changes in the Earth's development. Ice cores have revealed data about past ice ages, sea levels and solar activity. In the absence of local sources of pollution, it is possible to measure the world-wide spread of industrial pollutants. Pesticides applied in the north have been found in Antarctic air and ice. Such research requires a pristine environment. Mineral exploitation will jeopardize this important quality of the Antarctic. Moreover, this research is becoming increasingly important.

At the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in 1977 the Treaty States passed a recommendation which established the so-called policy of voluntary restraint with respect to Antarctic minerals. This effectively placed a moratorium on minerals

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

activity so long as timely progress was made towards a régime concerning mineral resources. Yet, in the name of science, a number of Treaty States have begun geophysical research on Antarctica's continental margins. The question is raised more and more frequently whether such programmes should be considered science or mineral activities. While it was the intention of the Treaty recommendation to prevent exploration and exploitation, it does not define the terms. Malaysia believes that mineral activities are actually, in effect, under way. In fact, recent publications make it very clear that, for instance, the United Kingdom science programme in Antarctica has an open bias towards research related to mineral resources.

We are pleased that several Consultative Party countries have already reconsidered and decided not to sign or ratify the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities. Among them are Australia, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, New Zealand and India. Indeed, some of them have joined the call of the international community for the establishment of Antarctica as a nature reserve or a world park, which could provide the best guarantee against harmful human activities in Antarctica.

France and Australia have indicated that mining in Antarctica is not compatible with the protection of the fragile environment. New Zealand has announced support for a permanent ban on mining in Antarctica. Public opinion is also reflected in the positions taken by other Treaty nations, such as Belgium, Italy and Spain. The Belgian and Italian Parliaments have, indeed, agreed not to sign or ratify the minerals Convention and to support a world park proposal.

Surely, the views of these Consultative Party countries, which are deeply involved in research activities in Antarctica, cannot be taken lightly. The joint initiative of Australia and France to build up support for the negotiation of a comprehensive régime for the protection of Antarctica's environment and its

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

dependent and associated ecosystems provides some hope that the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities may be put aside. The decision of the XVth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Paris to convene a special Consultative Meeting in Santiago from today, 19 November, to 7 December 1990, to explore and discuss all proposals relating to the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment is surely a reflection of the desire of the Consultative Parties to close ranks on the very controversial issue of protection for the Antarctic.

Although Malaysia supports any initiative to protect Antarctica's environment, we are opposed to the convening of such an exclusive meeting. The international community cannot allow the fate of Antarctica, which is a global concern, to be decided by the 25 Consultative Parties. It is our view that all members of the international community must participate in such negotiations, in order that any decisions taken on the protection of the global ecological commons take into account the interests of the world community at large.

In this connection, my delegation is of the conviction that environmental problems need to be discussed within the United Nations context, and not confined to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party countries. There is a need to draw up a comprehensive environment convention on the conservation and protection of the Antarctic and its dependent and associated ecosystems, as well as to establish a nature reserve or world park. This should be negotiated with the full participation of all members of the international community.

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

This, in our opinion, would be best pursued within the context of the United Nations system, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Brazil in 1992. It is inconceivable, given the highly political profile of environmental interest internationally, that the Antarctic Treaties Consultative Parties countries would seek to avoid co-operation with the United Nations on these issues.

Antarctica is truly the last continent left in the world where human destruction is the exception rather than the rule. If oil or other fossil fuels are ever to be extracted from Antarctica, then surely Antarctica will be the last continent to be ravaged of its riches. As a majority of scientists now agree that the long-theorized greenhouse effect is an impending reality, the short-sighted policies of industrialized nations may cause unprecedented damage to all life on Earth. There is no better place than Antarctica for all nations to take the first step towards acknowledging that our dependence on fuel must cease and there must be some wilderness areas left unspoiled for future generations. For these reasons my delegation wishes to reiterate its call for all nations to declare Antarctica a world park.

There exists a virtual consensus among climatologists that a process of significant global climate change is now under way. It is generally accepted that the release of chloro-fluorocarbons is partially responsible for this change. Chloro-fluorocarbons are also responsible for a complex series of chemical reactions that has already led to a decrease in the stratospheric ozone shield that prevents the Earth from being bombarded with excessive levels of ultraviolet radiation. Scientists are also anxious to discover how effective our oceans are at absorbing carbon dioxide, the gas omitted by factories and power stations that has been linked to global warming. Some scientists believe that oceans may now be close to carbon dioxide saturation. To find out if they are right, the exact

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

behaviour of oceans currents must be determined, particularly in polar areas where cold water sinks. These cold waters may be rich in carbon dioxide that has been absorbed from the air and are therefore removing danger from the atmosphere. Should they cease, however, our planet would be in deadly peril. Research undertaken in Antarctica has been largely responsible for revealing those problems. Surely this work should have priority over other uses of Antarctica.

Let me now turn to the working methods of the Treaty. The Antarctic Treaty is indeed an exclusive treaty, as decision-making powers are vested solely in the hands of the 25 Consultative Parties. The 14 non-consultative parties are mere observers. In effect it also means that 134 Members of the United Nations have no say in the decision-making pertaining to Antarctica. Yet all members of the international community will have to bear the consequences of development in Antarctica. In this time and age there can be no basis for such a patently discriminatory régime. The discriminatory Antarctic Treaties Consultative Parties régime runs counter to trends in international relations when cold war divisions are giving way to international democratization, consensus and co-operation.

I wish to highlight that the claims to Antarctic territory are not recognized by the international community. It should rightly be a world park for which all mankind must share responsibility in its protection and conservation. Decision-making on Antarctica must therefore rest with the entire international community. The time has come for the Antarctic Treaties Consultative Parties to respond to the new realities in international relations and not be captive to the situation of 30 years ago, when the Treaty was first formulated.

Another unacceptable feature of the Treaty is that its operations are secretive, lacking transparency. The documents of the consultative meetings are not made public in advance so that the inputs and views of the international

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

community can be taken into account. There has been an apparent attempt to rectify the secrecy of its documents, but unfortunately so far only certain categories of documents have been declassified, and long after the meetings were held.

While the Treaty purports to further the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, the Consultative Parties have repeatedly refused to invite the United Nations Secretary-General to the meetings of the Treaty Parties despite repeated General Assembly resolutions. The proposal for the participation of the Secretary-General is intended as part of a process to invest transparency in the Treaty as well as to begin the process of making it accountable to the international community. There can be no justification for the continuing absence of timely public information and the refusal to invite the participation of the Secretary-General.

At the same time, my delegation notes with deep regret that South Africa has still not been excluded from participation in the meetings of the Consultative Parties. The repeated appeals by the international community that South Africa, be excluded from participation in meetings seem to have fallen on deaf ears.

If indeed the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties are pledged to promote the purposes embodied in the Treaty, such as peaceful use, the facilitation of scientific research, international co-operation in scientific investigations, demilitarization, denuclearization and the preservation and conservation of the living resources in Antarctica, it is difficult to understand why they should object to a framework providing for universal participation and decision-making on matters relating to this global commons.

The argument that the Treaty has worked well in the past and the inference that universal participation would necessarily lead to political conflict and tension lack conviction as the preoccupation of the universal membership would be

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

directed towards the attainment of the objectives of international science and the common protection of the region in the interests of the very survival of mankind. The continued restrictive membership, secretiveness and unaccountability to the international community cannot possibly have any other interpretation than that the Treaty is an instrument used by the Consultative Parties to serve to perpetuate and advance their own interests rather than to protect humanity's interest in Antarctica. Only the international community can be the judge of how best Antarctica can be protected.

There is time yet for us to save Antarctica. By 23 June 1991 the Treaty will have been in force for 30 years. Under the provisions of the Treaty a review could then be called for by any of the Consultative Parties. The review will provide an appropriate occasion for the Consultative Parties to reflect on the growing international concern about Antarctica and the environment and the weakness of the Treaty system, and to accede to the changes which the international community has been calling for.

The international community must therefore take the initiative now to ensure that the continent will become the common heritage of all nations in the light of the provisions which provide for review of the Treaty in 1991. This will ensure that the Antarctic resources are for the benefit and interests of all mankind and that they are equitably shared by all nations, irrespective of the degree of their economic or scientific development.

In January this year President Mikhail Gorbachev made a historic statement to the participants in the global forum on environment and development for survival, held in Moscow. President Gorbachev indicated that the Soviet Union finds it necessary to develop an international legal mechanism for protecting unique natural zones of global importance. This primarily refers to the Antarctic. He further stated:

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

"The thick Antarctic ice-cap is an invaluable treasury of the Earth's past, of its geological and ecological history. Significantly, the Antarctic has become the world's first nuclear-free zone and the first ever territory fully open for international research programmes. The Soviet Union shares the concern of many scientists and public figures over the exploitation of the Antarctic's natural resources. Our grandchildren will never forgive us if we fail to preserve this phenomenal ecological system. The USSR is ready to join the programmes for creating a life-support system for the Antarctic - a nature preserve which belongs to the world and which is our common laboratory".

This is a welcome development, as it is consistent with our call for the Antarctic to be a nature reserve for all mankind, which we have repeatedly stressed and striven to achieve at the General Assembly since 1983. For Malaysia and the rest of the international community, we will continue to press for the universalist approach to the management of Antarctica.

Mr. DUMEVI (Ghana): The delegation of Ghana is happy to contribute once again to this important debate on agenda item 67 relating to Antarctica. We believe that, given the right attitude, such debates could be immensely useful in gauging the importance that a large majority of delegations attach to the question of an appropriate management régime for Antarctica. This subject has become particularly urgent in view of the increasing international focus on effective environmental protection of that important part of our planet. My delegation therefore looks forward to a productive exchange of views. We hope that the Antarctic Treaty Parties, which in the past have deliberately boycotted these debates, will now resume full co-operation with the non-Treaty parties and that, instead of speaking through one spokesman, as they were wont to do in past years, the Antarctic Treaty parties will participate fully in this year's debate in order to air all views and opinions. In our view, it is only through frank and open discussion of this important matter that the two sides can work towards an internationally acceptable arrangement for the management of Antarctica for the benefit of a wider community.

Ghana continues to recognize the effectiveness of the Treaty in keeping the Antarctica demilitarized and free from the arms race and nuclear weapons. We also recognize the opportunities the Antarctic Treaty has provided for co-operation and research. But we wish to observe that there are several flaws in the Treaty and therefore it cannot be said to have been designed to serve the interests of the wider international community. It is restrictive and hedged round with strict membership qualifications, which require, inter alia, the ability to conduct scientific research in the Antarctic. In these circumstances, the majority of the developing countries are being locked out of the Treaty's membership since they cannot meet these requirements.

(Mr. Dumevi, Ghana)

The determination of global interests and the ways of safeguarding them could, in our view, best be made by the entire community of nations. We do not therefore accept the proposition that a handful of nations should arrogate to themselves the right to take decisions for all merely because they have superior scientific knowledge and greater resources. The Antarctic system is an experiment in collective management initiated three decades ago by a group of nations that have met certain self-determined criteria and which have signed the Antarctic Treaty. The system therefore, as we have pointed out in previous debates, does not provide for international decision-making arrangements for dealing with matters of broad international concern, such as Antarctica.

But quite apart from these flaws in the Treaty, credible scientific and environmental groups have identified serious violations of the Treaty provisions, particularly in the area of conservation. These violations include the non-adoption of appropriate regulatory measures to control the harvesting of tiny shrimp-like crustacea, the main food chain in the Antarctic, consistent with the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, fishing in closed areas, bulldozing of garbage onto cliffs that penguins must pass to reach nesting sites, improper waste-disposal practices in breach of rules that the Treaty parties have laid down for themselves, and tanker oil spills. A report issued on 8 September 1989 by the representative of a Washington-based environmental policy institute, Friends of the Earth and Oceanic Society, has among other things, expressed serious concern that, contrary to all claims to a satisfactorily operating system, there is no environmental protection agency or infractions committee to make objective checks on violations of the rules and report on actions necessary to enforce those rules. The report has also observed that public accountability is lacking and that the obligation to carry out the scientific

(Mr. Dumevi, Ghana)

research required for attaining the status required for participation in decision-making discriminates against Treaty parties which choose not to build a permanent station. This, according to the report, has led to a concentration of bases and duplication of research efforts in geographically more accessible areas, with resultant serious adverse environmental impact in many of those areas. These violations and several other well-documented omissions clearly demonstrate that translating written regulations into actual measures has proved problematic within a treaty system already complicated by questions of territorial sovereignty.

Ghana believes that, given the wide recognition of the importance of Antarctica, the management and use of that continent should be conducted within the context of the Charter of the United Nations. This implies the application of the common-heritage principle, which is supported by an overwhelming majority of the international community. It is also our belief that the common-heritage approach will lay to rest the so-called territorial claims and counter-claims, which have prevented the adoption of effective measures to control activities in Antarctica. In this connection we believe that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and other relevant United Nations agreements are examples that can be drawn upon. At this point therefore we call upon the major industrialized nations which have withheld their support for the work of this vital arm of the United Nations to reconsider their stand and help push its work further than it has gone so far.

We have been following with interest the emerging perceptions around the world since the adoption of the Antarctic minerals Convention with regard to the responsibilities of Governments in the protection of the fragile environment in Antarctica. We welcome these perceptions, although they may be deemed to have failed, as of now, to address the concerns of the developing countries in the area of broad-based arrangements for managing Antarctica. The Minerals Convention, in

(Mr. Dumevi, Ghana)

our view, is essentially the perpetuation of the status quo. It maintains the restrctive and unequal structure of the present management régime. Like its parent Antarctic Treaty, therefore, it needs to be suspended or radically modified to meet the legitimate aspirations of the majority of the Members of the United Nations, which are unable to accede to the Treaty because of the difficult membership qualifications already referred to. We have also noted the growing support for a ban on mining, even among the few countries which have already signed the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities. We hope the ongoing Santiago meetng will clear the air as to where the Treaty Parties stand on the important question of the preservation or exploitation of Antarctica.

(Mr. Dumevi, Ghana)

As we consider the question of Antarctica, the issue of the continued association of South Africa with the Treaty cannot fail to invite comments. In spite of the ongoing talks about the future of that country, the call for South Africa's expulsion from Antarctic Treaty membership, in our view, is still valid. While the state of emergency has been lifted, 11 of the 12 pillars of apartheid are still on South Africa's statute books. The Group Areas Act, the Native Law Acts of 1913 and 1936, the Population Registration Act, various Homeland, Internal Security, Terrorism, Public Safety, Native Urban Areas and Bantu Authorities Acts, to mention only a few, continue to disenfranchise the majority of South Africans. In effect, the vast majority of South Africans, who are of the black race, cannot, as of now, be guaranteed the benefit of the resources of Antarctica, because the white minority has decreed that it be so. It is, therefore, our view that until such time as a democratic and a non-racial society is established in South Africa, we should continue to demand the denial of Treaty membership privileges to that country as an expression of our abhorrence of apartheid. South Africa at present has not earned the unquestioned confidence of the world at large as a civilized, humane nation which can be implicitly trusted not to abuse the privileges which membership of the Treaty entails. For this reason, we ask for the understanding and co-operation of the Treaty Parties.

In conclusion, the Ghana delegation continues to share the belief that, in order for the Antarctic Treaty to command universal support, its restrictive rules, which have debarred developing countries from acceding to the Treaty, or at least made it difficult for them to do so, will have to be reviewed. These yearly debates on the question of Antarctica have articulated the strong reservations of a good number of United Nations Members about the Antarctic Treaty. These reservations will continue to be expressed so long as the present closed-shop and

(Mr. Dumevi, Ghana)

restrictive structures of the Treaty remain. As the Treaty Parties celebrate the thirty-first anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty in 1991, we would like to hope that the many useful comments and ideas put forward in and outside the Committee will receive serious consideration by the Antarctic Party policy makers. The overriding commitment, in our view, should be a management régime that allows a wider international community to be involved and not kept out. This demands a Treaty system which is more universal, more open and more responsive to the legitimate aspirations of all. We request the Treaty Parties to see our suggestions in this positive light and to give them serious thought, instead of dismissing them as nuisances. Each one of us as nations has equal claims upon the planet on which we live. To that end, we are ready to return to the consensus approach, and hope that the two-part draft resolution which is before the Committee will be considered and given positive support and that the regrettable attitude of "non-participating", which has characterized decision-making on this important item at previous General Assembly sessions, will not prevail.

Our goal, it should be emphasized, is to save, manage and keep Antarctica for all citizens of the world and for future generations. In our changing world, in which global participation in addressing common issues has acquired unambiguous legitimacy, let us not be found to be averse to change and rigidly attached to restrictive practices, which many be deemed to smack of hegemonistic tendencies, arrogance and capricious intent.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-FIFTH SESSION

Official Records

FIRST COMMITTEE
41st meeting
held on
Tuesday, 20 November 1990
at 10 a.m.
New York

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 41st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. Rana (Nepal)

CONTENTS

- Question of Antarctica: general debate, consideration of and action on draft resolutions (continued)

This record is subject to correction.
Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, Room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.1/45/PV.41
26 November 1990
ENGLISH

90-63250 3249V (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 67 (continued)

QUESTION OF ANTARCTICA: GENERAL DEBATE, CONSIDERATION OF AND ACTION ON DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

Mr. JAYASINGHE (Sri Lanka): My delegation fully endorses the statement made by the representative of Malaysia, who is the co-ordinator of the group of non-aligned countries which submitted the draft resolutions on the question of Antarctica.

In addition to what has already been stated, my delegation wishes to submit a few comments reiterating its basic views on this important question. Our fundamental concerns are based on two premises, namely the principle involved in the question of Antarctica and the practical difficulties occasioned by the present arrangement for the management of Antarctica. The principle we would like to uphold in the management of Antarctica is the principle of universality. The commitment to this principle is prompted by the firm belief that Antarctica remains a territory where no particular legitimate territorial rights have been conferred on any individual State by the community of nations.

The practical difficulties concern us since the activities in Antarctica will have repercussions not only on that continent but on the entire globe. On both these counts we firmly believe that the governing of Antarctica should be the inalienable right of the international community as a whole. The principle of universality is well entrenched and respected in the practice of international relations. In particular, we in the United Nations are the custodians and the promoters of this cardinal principle. It is not necessary for my delegation to go into lengthy detail to prove to this Committee the importance of adherence to this principle.

(Mr. Jayasinghe, Sri Lanka)

The other aspects of my delegation's concerns are the adverse effects on the global environment that have been identified as a result of the increased human activities on that continent. Disposal of various chemicals, toxic gas and other refuse, changes in the climatic conditions, disturbances caused to the natural habitat, over fishing and mushrooming of research stations are some of the activities that are threatening the fragile balance of Antarctica in an alarming way. Once this balance is disturbed, the repercussions have terribly adverse effects on other parts of the globe. This aspect was dealt with very eloquently by the representative of Malaysia in his statement.

In spite of the repeated requests of an overwhelming majority of Member States, the Parties to the Antarctic Treaty have failed to take any meaningful steps to remove some of the built-in drawbacks of the Treaty with a view to putting an end to its exclusivity. If the parties are genuine in their desire to broaden the base of the management of Antarctica, they should take appropriate action to eliminate the provisions that have closed the door to a majority of Member States. To encourage gradual progress towards this end, the sponsors and those Member States that supported the draft resolution on the question of Antarctica proposed a series of measures. For instance, these draft resolutions called for inviting the Secretary-General of the United Nations or his representatives to the meetings of the Treaty Parties. It was also suggested that the Secretary-General of the United Nations be made the depositary of activities relating to Antarctica. However, the Treaty Parties have failed so far to accede to these requests, thus reaffirming their reluctance to broaden the base of the management of Antarctica. In this forum they continue to decline to participate in an exchange of views, which is a matter of great regret.

(Mr. Jayasinghe, Sri Lanka)

We welcome the proposal of Australia and France to declare Antarctica a wilderness park, which would minimize the risk of threatening the safety of this fragile continent through the undertaking of mining and other activities. This proposal, prompted by the discovery that the convention on mining in Antarctica has several flaws, is a typical example of the ill effects of the exclusive management of Antarctica.

As members of the Committee are aware, the decision to establish the minerals régime was taken in defiance of the overwhelming view of the international community that the Parties should refrain from adopting such a régime. If the international community as a whole had been involved in this decision, my delegation is confident that such a decision would never have been taken. However, we are glad that some Treaty Parties themselves have discovered the inadvisability of such a project. The democratization of the management of Antarctica is the key to avoiding such ill-conceived projects in the future.

My delegation would also like, at this stage, to offer a few comments on draft resolution A/C.1/45/L.64, on the question on Antarctica, the prime purpose of which is to exert continued pressure on South Africa, in the hope that it will eventually abandon the abhorrent policy of apartheid. Here again, irrespective of repeated requests by a large number of States, we have not succeeded. My delegation is aware that in recent months the South African régime has taken some encouraging steps, suggesting that it may eventually agree to dismantle apartheid in South Africa. However, these measures are still far short of the expectations of the majority of the South African people and of the international community as a whole. The discriminatory policy of apartheid remains very much in place. As long as this discrimination continues to shock the civilized world we have to work resolutely towards dismantling it. With this in mind we are requesting the

(Mr. Jayasinghe, Sri Lanka)

Antarctic Treaty Parties to take urgent measures to exclude the racist régime of South Africa from participation in the meetings of the Consultative Parties at the earliest possible date.

We are working in a new international system, where the actors are more and more inclined to uphold reason and to co-operate with each other in an impartial manner on the basis of justice and fairness. We can only strengthen this system by basing our actions on merit and moral convictions. As in the case of many other issues before us, if that yardstick is applied in the case of the question of Antarctica, it is my delegation's belief that the two draft resolutions before us will be adopted by consensus in the First Committee and pave the way for the establishment of a truly international management system for dealing with Antarctica - a system which takes into account the collective interests of the international community, from which mankind will benefit immensely.

Mr. SHARMA (Nepal): I wish to state that my delegation associates itself fully with the detailed statement made by the representative of Malaysia in the First Committee on this item yesterday.

At its forty-fourth session the General Assembly once again failed, for the fourth time in succession, to reach a consensus on the question of Antarctica. The debate on the item was also once again marked by the non-participation of States parties to the Antarctic Treaty system. Despite this lacuna, the debate last year focused on the concern over the protection of the fragile environment and atmosphere of Antarctica.

(Mr. Sharma, Nepal)

There is today a growing awareness of the climate and ecosystem. The continent of Antarctica is serving as a crucial area in our continuing efforts to understand such phenomena as global warming and the ozone layer. Scientists and environmentalists have stressed the vital obligation to protect the natural environment of Antarctica and its associated and dependent ecosystem. They have produced convincing arguments that Antarctica should be preserved from development as the last continent that has not been substantially altered by human activities.

The adverse impact of the limited but unco-ordinated human activities to date on the Antarctic environment has been well documented. It is therefore understandable that the adoption in 1988 of the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resources Activities in open disregard of a General Assembly appeal for a moratorium on a mineral régime aroused deep apprehension.

Faced with an almost global outcry over the prospect of mineral activities in Antarctica, the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties have taken pains to argue that the Convention does not open the continent to unregulated mining and development of oil resources. They also point out that it does not presume that mining or oil extraction will definitely take place. The Consultative Parties also argue that the Convention is a landmark in the evolution of environmental law and that its environmental provisions are unique in their vigour and content.

These arguments have, however, failed to convince scientists and environmentalists. Indeed, there is today an almost universal consensus that implementation of the Convention will encourage a destructive development of Antarctica. According to a recent story in The New York Times, Will Martin, Director of the Wildnerness Society's Antarctica Project, believes that the exploitation of the Antarctic's mineral wealth will produce catastrophic damage to its environment from facilities, towns, roads, airstrips, waste disposal facilities and spills.

(Mr. Sharma, Nepal)

During the debate on this item last year, my delegation expressed regret at the apparent fait accompli presented by the Consultative Parties in adopting the Convention. We are, however, encouraged to note that several of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties are now having serious second thoughts on the wisdom of bringing the Convention into force. We in particular welcome the announcements in this regard by Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, India, Italy and New Zealand. We welcome the initiatives taken by Australia and France for a comprehensive environmental convention including the designation of Antarctica as a "natural reserve/land of science". We sincerely hope that the special session of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties meeting in Santiago will give serious consideration to the proposal made by the Foreign Minister of Australia in his statement in the General Assembly this year for the establishment of a far-sighted, comprehensive environmental protection régime to guarantee, once and for all, the permanence of Antarctica's uniquely fragile and irreplaceable environment.

The withdrawal of support for the Convention by some Consultative Parties has hopefully made this agreement a dead letter. The Congress of the United States has also thrown its weight behind this important move by adopting two Bills opposing ratification of the agreement. This will go a long way in promoting international efforts to preserve Antarctica as a global ecological commons.

My delegation regrets the rejection by the Consultative Parties of the call to declare Antarctica the common heritage of mankind, as the international community has rightly done in the case of oceans and outer space. Such a step has the full endorsement of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of African Unity. The pivotal influence of Antarctica on the world climate and in influencing oceanic current and atmosphere is now well known. We cannot accept that the activities of a privileged few should set in motion irreversible and adverse climatic changes

(Mr. Sharma, Nepal)

affecting the whole world. Only by designating Antarctica as the common heritage of mankind can the world climate be considered as part of mankind's common heritage. We are happy that the issue is an important part of the process preparatory to the 1992 World Conference on Environment and Development.

It is unfortunate that, despite the numerous resolutions of the General Assembly, the Consultative Parties continue to treat Antarctica as the exclusive privilege of a few. We regret that the Consultative Parties have also continued to ignore the wishes of the overwhelming majority of Member States of the United Nations by refusing to invite the Secretary-General or his representative to meetings of the Consultative Parties, including the special session now under way in Santiago. As the organization with almost universal membership, it is only logical that the United Nations should be a party to any activity on Antarctica.

My delegation also finds it completely unacceptable that the racist minority régime of South Africa should continue to be granted Antartic Treaty Consultative Party status. We reiterate our call for the immediate expulsion of South Africa from Antarctic Treaty consultative meetings, which would reflect the universal rejection of the ahorrent policy of apartheid.

My delegation wishes to place on record its appreciation of the several positive features of the Antarctic Treaty. We support the setting aside by the Treaty of the differences among States over the existence of territorial sovereignty in Antarctica. The Treaty has made Antarctica the world's first nuclear-weapon-free zone. It guarantees freedom of scientific research in the continent, prohibits all military activities and nuclear explosions, and the dumping of radioactive wastes there. The Treaty System also includes major agreements to conserve and protect the environment and living species in Antarctica. The need is to expand the system by making it universal and by making

(Mr. Sharma, Nepal)

the United Nations the repository of all information on Antarctica. As President Gorbachev said in his address to the Global Forum on Environment and Development for Survival in January this year,

"Our grandchildren will never forgive us if we fail to preserve this phenomenal ecological system".

We also welcome President Gorbachev's announcement that the Soviet Union stands ready to join the programme for creating a life support system for Antarctica, a nature preserve that belongs to the world and is our common laboratory.

Mr. SAVUA (Fiji): The evolutionary progress we have seen in the attempts by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties to heed international concerns about the protection of Antarctica should be commended. While it is still too early to note these moves being manifested in greater congeniality and co-operation, the outlook appears promising. The symbiotic dependency that mankind has with Antarctica is now so well researched and documented that the preservation of the continent is critical for the survival of future generations. Yet despite these shifts in understanding and awareness, we have yet to witness a substantial thaw in attitudes that can result in harmonizing the two schools of thought vis-à-vis the Antarctic Treaty with the United Nations system.

At this session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General's report contained in two documents (A/45/458 and A/45/459) cover a mere four pages and expound on the views of the Antarctic Treaty Parties with respect to the Secretary-General's note of 19 March 1990. May we again note that they are conspicuous by their brevity.

(Mr. Savua, Fiji)

The invitation contained in the report for States Members of the United Nations to participate in research work by acceding to the Antarctic Treaty would have been laudable if it were not for the fact that participation is accompanied by the obligation substantially to contribute financially or in kind, an obligation most Members of the Organization would not be able to meet irrespective of how many ways they can reschedule and rearrange their financial priorities. Hence the Antarctic Treaty is discriminatory, as it places a divisive line between consultative and non-consultative parties of the Treaty membership. While we accept the principle that one must be prepared to pay one's way, we also believe that it should be possible to devise a system of representation and consultation that is fairer, less exclusive and more democratic than the existing one.

My delegation supports the argument that the best way the Antarctic Treaty can serve the hopes and safeguard the interests of all nations is for it to be placed under the United Nations system. Only in this way can the last virgin continent on Earth be protected by the combined goodwill of all peoples, instead of being tied to the dictates of the 25 Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties. The General Assembly's annually reiterated call on the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties to invite the Secretary-General or his representative to their meetings is in our view a means by which the proceedings can be disseminated as broadly as possible by an internationally credible office. We again join others in expressing regret that no such invitation has been extended.

One of the current major concerns facing Antarctica is the dilemma as to whether it should become an internationally protected world park or be opened for commercial exploitation, albeit at a future time. The welcome change of heart by Australia and France to depart from past policy and instead transform the continent into a world park should receive wide support. Such a park should be protected by

(Mr. Savua, Fiji)

a convention on environmental safeguards, which would regulate all aspects of human activity and forbid the exploitation of Antarctica's natural resources of oil and minerals.

While the view may be held that a pollution-free Antarctica is wanted together with a useful Antarctica, this can only hold true if the usefulness excludes exploitation. The threats to the Antarctic environment even now are of a magnitude that has caused considerable alarm to non-Treaty States and other environmental organizations. These threats were set out in some detail by the representative of Malaysia in his statement yesterday. To this we would like to add that, despite the safeguards imposed by a minerals convention and an accompanied moratorium, we have yet to be convinced that any form of exploitation, be it exploratory or otherwise, will not pollute or affect the fragile ecosystem of Antarctica, just as we have yet to be convinced that you can make an omelette without breaking an egg.

At present, we are told that there is only an informal gentlemen's agreement among Treaty members to refrain from exploration. It then follows that having a set of rules like the minerals convention is better than no rules at all. We believe that this is all the more reason why the Antarctic Treaty should be placed under the United Nations system, where truants can be faced with world-wide condemnation instead of an apology for breaching a set of agreements for an exclusive group of privileged members. We hope that when the thirtieth anniversary of the coming into force of the Antarctic Treaty is reached on 23 June 1991, a consultative party will deem it appropriate to call for a review to discuss the growing international concern for the continent and perhaps accede to the calls of the majority and make participation and consultation less prohibitive and exclusive.

The ecosystem and future of Fiji and other small low-lying South Pacific and Indian Ocean island nations is inextricably linked to that of Antarctica. We would

(Mr. Savua, Fiji)

be one of the first to be affected by any significant change in the Antarctic environment. Our concerns regarding global warming and the rise in sea-level and the dangers of not bringing ozone-depleting chemicals under control have often been mentioned in many international forums. The declaration of the South Pacific nuclear-weapon-free zone was a means of extending the Antarctic nuclear-weapon-free zone to its contiguous neighbours. It is our earnest hope that the plight of the highly ecologically vulnerable island States in the Pacific and Indian Oceans can be taken into account.

In their note to the Secretary-General contained in document A/45/459, the Antarctic Treaty Parties state:

> "The Antarctic Treaty Parties are aware of the need for concerted international action to protect the Antarctic environment from external environmental disturbances which could accelerate serious global environmental change." (A/45/459, para. 4)

While we wish to applaud this statement, it is also our hope that this awareness is not expressed in isolation to satisfy the few, but is, rather, accompanied by an obligation to be held accountable to an increasingly wider circle that would embrace the whole of mankind.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.